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INAUGURAL ADDRESS

OF

GOVERNOR T. WATKINS LIGON.

FELLOW CITIZENS:

Deeply impressed with the responsibility imposed upon me by the people of Maryland, in calling me to discharge the duties of the Executive Office, and not insensible to the arduous and perplexing trusts incident to such a position, I enter upon the performance of the task which the oath I have just taken requires, with an unfeigned distrust of my ability suitably to reward so large a measure of public confidence, but with a deliberate purpose to administer that branch of the Government entrusted to my care in strict accordance with the best interest of the people and my own constitutional obligations.

I feel profoundly grateful for the distinguished though unmerited honor that has been conferred upon me, and with an earnest desire to secure the public approval in all my official conduct, I shall strive to merit it by an honest effort to discharge my whole duty, and by a rigid observance of those tried and cherished principles of public policy which lie at the foundation of our Government, and have given stability and value to the Institutions of our country.

To so enact my part as to contribute to the honor and permanent welfare of our State, shall constitute my highest ambition, and to this object my best efforts shall be cordially and constantly devoted

At no period in our history have we had greater cause for congratulation on our condition as a State than at this moment. Through the direct instrumentality of the sovereign power, the organic law has been remodeled, and given to us in the form of a Constitution, in which the strong and leading principles consistent with the spirit of the age and the genius of our civil institutions have been liberally recognised. The toils and struggles of years gave birth to the instrument under which we are now living. The first demand by the people for a reformed constitution had my earnest sympathies, and the result of their work has my approval and support.

But while every true friend to a more liberal constitution has good reason to rejoice in the ultimate triumph which crowned their exertions, and although many of the anti-republican features of our former system have given place to those better suited to the times, much remains to be done. The new constitution has broadly and unequivocally recognised the "inalienable right" of the people to amend, alter, or abolish their form of Government, whenever in their judgment it has failed to accomplish the purpose for which it was intended; and fixed stated periods for ascertaining the public will. It has approximated more nearly to the sound principle of representation according to population; and thereby enlarged the area of human rights; it has given to the people the privilege of electing a still larger number of their own officers, and thus increased greatly their direct interest and responsibility in the affairs of Government; it has thrown open the prison doors to the honest and helpless debtor and bid him go free; it has cast around the Legislature wholesome restrictions to guard against extravagance in the expenditure of public money, and the creation of public debt, it has established sound precautions and wise penalties against an unholy exercise of the right of suffrage; it has deprived the Legislative branch of the Government (elected for other purposes and without direct instruction from the public voice) of all power to alter or abridge any constitutional provision; it has done these and many other things, to which the public heart as well as the public judgment has cordially responded, and yet much is left for energetic legislation to accomplish.

The assembled wisdom of that body, the Reform Convention—one which shed a rich lustre upon the bright character of our State, through the giant minds it numbered—could not give to the new constitution that vitality which it required by subsequent legislation. They left their work—not perfect—but well done. That the new constitution in itself, as it came from their hands, was a triumphant redemption in the main of the pledges of the reformers, and deserved the emphatic confirmation it received through the ballot-box, few if any are now prepared to deny; but the Legislature, which has since its adoption been engaged in the preparation of the necessary measures to give it force, though they have accomplished much, have not yet done all that is required.

In relation to the elective judiciary, where the strong doubts

of many sound judgments were lodged, our experience, though short, is amply sufficient to vindicate the policy. The judges elected have been such, as a body, as will do no discredit to the system or the people, and will contrast most favorably with those of our sister States. It may be the misfortune in some cases that incompetent or unworthy men shall attain positions upon the bench for which they are unqualified, but is this risk more to be dreaded than a system of life-tenure subject to an appointing power, liable to be influenced by the same partizan considerations? I do not hesitate to express my conviction that, in our progress thus far under the new system, all the circumstances properly weighed, the wisdom of the convention on this point has been abundantly sustained.

All that is necessary to render an elective judiciary, under the present limitations, infinitely superior to the old system, is a proper degree of vigilance and caution on the part of the people. The happiness and interests of the community are too seriously dependant on a sound and faithful administration of the laws to permit a laxity of principle for any length of time, in the election of judges. A high standard should be set up and irrevocably observed in their selection. Not only unquestionable capacity and legal acquirements, but pure moral attributes, should be regarded as essentially requisite in the candidate to insure the favor of the people. It is labor lost to enact good laws if they be not strictly enforced; and the influence of example in the ministers of the law is always potent for good or evil.

Those who vaguely predicted the most serious confusion, and consequent injury to private and public interests, from the changes which were contemplated in the various departments of public business, have been fortunately disappointed in their unfounded anticipations; and I feel confident that all the objections urged against the constitution can be entirely removed, or at least rendered inapplicable, by prompt and decided acts of legislation. The people have sanctioned the work in good faith and accepted it as their organic law; they have a right to demand at the hands of those delegated for the purpose, the enactment of such laws as will give to it perfection as nearly as human wisdom is capable. To that end I recognize my responsibility, and in conjunction with the legislative branch of the government, in whose patriotism and ability I have sincere confidence, I am prepared to lend my hearty co-operation.

In connection with no subject demanding the attention of our people and the fostering care of the State, do I feel a greater interest than that of education. Our beautiful but complicated system of government is based upon the intelligence and virtue of the masses. Enslavement of mind is necessarily the result of ignorance. Vices, which the rigors of the law cannot correct, may be prevented by the elevating and ennobling influence of intellectual and moral cultivation. Under a monarchy ignorance may be tolerated, but the very genius of our institutions scorns it as its

most dangerous antagonist; a free people, to be happily free, must be educated. Our forefathers who constructed the beneficent form of government under which it is our happy fortune to live, left upon record their opinions of the necessity of education for the immortality of their work.

At such time as is practicable and consistent with our interests, and the ultimate success of the cause itself, our best energies should be devoted to the establishment and support of a well digested system of common schools, where every child, no matter what its position or misfortune, may receive the blessings of a sound primary education. Years have elapsed since Maryland should have had a permanent and general system of public schools. While our people are not inferior to those of any State in the Union in the fervor of their patriotism, in their attachments to their country, in their loyalty to the constitution, in their generous devotion to the comprehensive interests of the nation, and in their fidelity to their own obligations and the laws of the land, it must be acknowledged they are behind many of their sister States in the facilities afforded for popular instruction.

Many of the best minds of the present century can look back with satisfaction and trace the first dawnings of their intellect to opportunities afforded them for tuition in the common schools, and yet for want of such advantages thousands of the youth of our land who are gifted by nature with those endowments which would fit them to adorn society and become useful men in the various callings of life, are doomed to imbibe the vices and habits which surround them, of which idleness, neglect and evil associations are the prolific cause.

It is not from a disintegrated system (such as now exists among us) that our fond hopes of a diffused elevation of the youthful mind is to be realized. It is from a well arranged and amply supported general system of primary schools, having a common head, and uniform throughout the State in its basis and mode of operation, that great and permanent results are to be expected. To this noble cause, upon which to a large extent the future happiness and security of our common country and its institutions must depend, my warmest hopes are directed, and to it I earnestly invoke the attention of the Legislature.

I have witnessed with great satisfaction the demonstration of practical enthusiasm which abound among the people of our State on the subject of agriculture. The last few years have added much to our happiness and to the enhancement of our wealth, by the growing interest which has been awakened to the improvement of our soils. Science, without which the hand of man against a thousand blind chances must toil hopelessly on, has been confidently appealed to and made to minister to our wants and necessities. Many portions of our territory, once uninviting and cheerless prospects to the eye of the agriculturist, have by the aid of science been made to gladden the hearts of their

proprietors by yielding up their resources of wealth and munificence.

Vast quantities of land have been reclaimed from the generation of foul malarias, and been made to contribute to the health and comforts of their owners, under the renovating effects of assistants suggested by the discoveries in scientific and chemical investigations. All this is not only profitable to us as a people, but productive of the richest social blessings. To the gradual development of these cheering results the action of the Legislature heretofore has contributed its helping hand; but only a tithe of what ought to be done has been as yet commenced. Great consequences to the present and future generations will flow from the continued aid to the cause of agriculture by our State government. Maryland is rich in her mineral resources, while her lands are susceptible of high cultivation; and the most important class of our population—the agriculturists—from whom so large a share of the material support to the government is drawn, should be generously stimulated in their noble pursuits by the kind and fostering care of the State.

While Maryland, in all her relations to the general government and her sister States, occupies a position eminently satisfactory, her domestic condition is one of no less encouragement. Through all the trying scenes she has had to pass, (the result of her liberality in sustaining her public works,) her credit has never been seriously tarnished, and she now bears an enviable character in a financial point of view. The various public works of our State have continued to expand in their capacities and permanent resources. The whole State, and especially the city of Baltimore—which should ever command our pride and support in the development and fostering of her commercial interests—has enjoyed the multiform benefits arising from these works, while the people have manfully borne the heavy burdens cast upon them, and continued to meet promptly the demands of the Treasury.

The control of these vast interests has by the Constitution devolved principally upon a co ordinate branch of the government—the Board of Commissioners of Public Works. Their wisdom, I am sure, will point out the course best to be pursued in their management and future disposition. It would be inappropriate in me to suggest to them or to you, Senators and Representatives, any specific measure in relation to them at this stage of my administration, nor is it necessary at this time to discuss in detail the relations borne by the State to her public works, nor their financial condition. The result of some of these enterprises which the State has liberally fostered, has not been such as was by many anticipated when the credit of the State was loaned for their construction. Yet, on the other hand, it may be remarked that the benefits accruing to the State should not be measured by the direct profit or loss upon the actual investment, or the amount of revenue annually derivable to the Treasury on their account. The State is the gainer wherever the result has been an increase in the extent and

facilities of trade, because the value of the property of the State is thus increased, and the basis of taxation, which is its legitimate source of revenue and power, correspondingly enlarged. This is, perhaps, the chief end to which the State should mainly look in her relations to these works. It may, indeed, be gravely considered whether any connection with such works is desirable by the State, other than such supervisory power as may be necessary to prevent the abuse or misapplication of corporate privileges.

The recent installation of Franklin Pierce as President of the Republic owing to the momentous issue supposed to be involved in the late Presidential canvass, was marked by an unusual exhibition of popular feeling, and furnished an occasion of sincere congratulation to every friend of the Union and the Constitution. To the manly utterance of the sound doctrines which characterized his inaugural address, the whole country signified its approval and acquiescence; my own judgment cordially endorsed the views there laid down as the basis of his administration, and with undiminished confidence in his determination sacredly to carry them out, I look forward to an able and patriotic administration of the general government.

I congratulate you, fellow-citizens, upon the harmonious settlement of those agitating questions which at one time threatened to disturb the peace of our country. My immediate predecessor was called to the discharge of delicate duties, incident to that agitation, by most distressing calamities, from a repetition of which I hope our future may be spared. It affords me much pleasure to bear my humble testimony to the ability, dignity and firmness which characterized the official conduct of our executive in relation to those deeply aggravated issues; the sentiments which actuated him were alike honorable to the State and to himself, and reflected truly the feelings of our people. They meet my own cordial approbation, and promptly on every similar occasion, during my official term, shall those principles be maintained.

The position of Maryland in connection with the discussion of the slavery question is one of serious import. Being in this relation a border State, she is so situated as to be peculiarly liable to the devastating consequences of fanatical forays upon her rights of property. Constantly exposed to the insulting menaces of those who ruthlessly aim at the accomplishment of their wild schemes, and hourly in danger of losses from the incursions of insidious foes, by her contiguity to the free States, and from time to time challenged by solemn provocations to deeds of vengeance, her people have exhibited a magnanimity and patriotism worthy the highest praise. Partaking largely of the chivalric character of their Southern brethren, and keenly sensitive to any infringement of their constitutional rights, they have calmly and patiently, time and again, submitted to wrongs and insults at the hands of a few misguided zealots, for the sake of peace and fraternal relations with her sister States.

Maryland has never sympathized with the foes of the Union in

any quater; she will stand by the Constitution to the last. But she will always firmly insist on a strict interpretation of that instrument in just accordance with the established views of its illustrious founders.

The reserved rights of the States must not be lost by a loose construction of the sacred compact at the hands of the Federal Government. Herein lies the whole danger of our existence as a nation. Devotion to the Union must imply a devotion to the constitution in all its parts, and strictly in compliance with all its compromises. To profess respect for the Union without a sacred observance in good faith of all the terms of the constitution, is nothing less than treason in its most dangerous and insidious form.

Happily for us all, the immediate dangers which threatened our confederacy—which shook the hearts of the stearest patriots; and which stirred the souls of our strong men to high and noble deeds, have, by the measures of the compromise, been averted. But the seeds of disunion are not all decayed. Their bitter fruits may still be forced to our lips, if a wanton forfeiture of the obligations of the federal compact be permitted. A faithful adherence to the inviolable terms of the constitution, and an unfaltering protection of the States in the enjoyment of every right guaranteed to them, is the only infallible policy which will protect us against the enemies of the Union, under whatever name, and secure to us as a nation the enjoyment of those blessings which are so obviously held in store for us by the future.

I cannot conclude without giving emphatic expression to the high sense I entertain of the importance of preserving the good faith of the State sacred and inviolate. To do this effectually, we should maintain a just economy in public expenditures; and honestly apply, without improper diversion, all the resources set apart by our laws for the payment of our debt. The people may always be relied upon to bear their full share of the public burden, whenever the interest and honor of the State demand it; we should not, from an unmanly restiveness under temporary sacrifice for the public good, further lessen our annual income, while so large an amount of the public debt remains unpaid. This policy would, in my judgment, meet the public approbation, and at the same time promote the solid interests of that steadily expanding trade and commerce which the enterprise of our citizens as well as the government of our State have for so many years sedulously labored to develop. Our commerce, manufactures and mechanic arts—our mines, canals and roads—our improved agriculture—have wonderfully added to the aggregate wealth of the State during the last few years. To conduct them with profit and advantage, large capital is not only becoming more and more desirable, but absolutely indispensable; it is due to these great interests, as well as to ourselves, that no suspicion or doubt should be felt anywhere of the resolute purpose of the State at any sacrifice to discharge fully all her obligations.

I have thought proper, fellow-citizens, thus briefly to enunciate

my views to you on some of the leading topics which may command my attention as your executive officer. While I shall rely upon the wisdom of the Legislative branches of the government to aid me in an honest and judicious administration of the public affairs, I shall, under the guidance of an over-ruling power, endeavor to meet all the requirements of the Constitution at my hands, fearlessly, faithfully, and without partiality. I mean to know no controlling influence in the discharge of my duties, save that which in my judgment is legitimately recognised by the Constitution which you have laid down as my guide, and that of the sacred interests of the people, in whose virtue and patriotism, and impartial judgment, I place profound reliance.

Invoking the continued blessings of Providence on our State and its citizens, who have been so signally favored in the past, in all that appertains to their true and lasting interests, and sincerely actuated by the sentiments I have thus advanced in your presence, I assume the duties of the station to which, by your free voice, I have been called.

